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> You may have seen my works many a time, — though it's fifty thousand to one if you have seen me. You say you don't want to see me? You say that your interest is in my works, and not in me? Don't be too sure about that.
>
> — Charles Dickens
> Somebody's Luggage

Ever since the last months of 1952, when we published and discussed his "Freudianism, Criticism, and Jane Eyre," we have been awaiting another contribution from our charter member and 1953 chairman, Wayne Burns. Distant rumblings have reached our ears of an extended critical work on the Victorian novelist Charles Reade, written in part during a leave spent in England and on the Continent, and now running rapidly toward completion. It is with great pleasure, therefore, that we offer as the leading article for this issue one chapter from that work, a chapter that bears out the suggestion by Dickens which constitutes our epigraph for this issue.

As usual Professor Burns works within the framework he has set for himself. As he wrote in a recent letter:

> ... I have intentionally played down Freudian analysis and terminology in an effort to make the materials speak for themselves. In other words, my aim is to give the interpretations the materials demand — which is of course Freudian — without the direct use of Freudian concepts or terminology.
>
> ... [T]his is not a chapter in a biography. It is a chapter in a study of Charles Reade's artistic failure. (The title of the book is The Defeat of Charles Reade: A Study in Victorian Authorship.) The present chapter, then, presents Reade's emotional development, Chapter III his intellectual development, Chapters IV and V his artistic development, etc. These later chapters go over the same biographical material as this chapter — my aim being to show how first he covered his emotional difficulties with intellectual rationalizations, then with artistic rationalizations, etc., etc., until he buried his real self, his real vision, beneath a series of Victorian formulas. This is why he failed as a novelist. And I shall go on to show that this is why nearly all the Victorian novelists were defeated, why so many modern novelists are now being defeated.

The Editor was amazed to note how often the data on Reade parallelled his own discoveries and conclusions on Dickens, despite the immense social, economic, and artistic differences between the two Victorian authors.

Because of the length of Professor Burns's paper, no bibliography is included in this issue. There will be extended bibliographical material in the September issue. Contributions will be enthusiastically received. — Word has just been received that our annual Conference has been set by MLA for Tuesday, December 28th, at 3:45 P. M.

1835. - Assist us, merciful God in the settlement of our son Charles, and suffer neither his wishes nor our weakness to prevail in any line that may injure his soul and bring him to the grave in sorrow. Convert his soul, and make him a child of grace, and then direct his path, and guide us in all our ways with him. Correct every false view of life, and bring all our wishes into one point, the salvation of his soul!

---- From the manuscript Dear Mother

He was tall and stout, of a fine florid complexion, and with large wide-opened eyes, gentle and mild, as I think he himself used to say, "like those of a cow." His voice was rather husky, and gave one sometimes the idea that he was speaking with suppressed passion.

---- Edward Marston. After Work: Fragments from the Workshop of an Old Publisher

One could not imagine his doing a mean or ignoble thing... . But his indomitable pugnacity, his determination to resent every supposed offence, his intolerance of adverse criticism - even the most considerate and qualified - and his immense self-conceit, made enemies for him everywhere... . Where another author would have seen only some inferior person's want of appreciation, Charles Reade saw the deadly hand of some malignant assassin. He was as ready with his threats of an action for damages as a politician out West in the old days would have been with his cowhide.

---- Justin McCarthy. Reminiscences

Charles Reade was a Victorian eccentric; indeed he was so "entirely odd in the ordinary relations of life" that Goldwin Smith and a number of others apparently considered him crazy[1]. Of course Reade had his defenders — those who tried to explain his oddities as the concomitants of genius — yet on occasion they too were perplexed: as for instance, the time the young W. B. Maxwell encountered an antelope in Reade's London home. Reade's acquaintances were constantly subjected to minor shocks of this kind, plus others of a more serious nature, such as those which prompted Trollope (in his Autobiography) to say he looked upon Reade "as one endowed almost with genius but as one who has not been gifted with the ordinary powers of reasoning." And Trollope, it should be noted, was trying to be friendly. The truth is, none of Reade's contemporaries, friendly or unfriendly, could fathom the depths of his Jekyll-Hyde duality.

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1. Goldwin Smith's remarks have been quoted and discussed by Malcolm Elwin, p. 56. [Bibliographical data on the four leading biographies cited are given below.] To save time and space I shall not ordinarily give footnote references to well-known materials contained in any of the four biographies of Reade. The present chapter is for the most part a reinterpretation of the biographical data contained in those books, due allowance of course being made for their shortcomings. The Memoir (1887) and John Coleman's Charles Reade as I Knew Him (1903) have been more or less accurately characterized by Elwin: "Coleman's elastic notions of a biographer's conscience allowed him to paraphrase Compton Reade's Memoir and call it Charles Reade's 'autobiography' as recounted to himself... . Unfortunately for Coleman, the Memoir, whenever it strays from the quotation of documents, is itself a treacherous authority." Although Elwin's own biography (1931) is somewhat weakened by excessive distrust of the Memoir, his own interpretation of Reade is, within its own limits, truly perceptive. Rives, on the other hand, is totally inept: her study (1941) is valuable only for the new biographical data it includes. In short, the definitive biography is yet to be written.

Confronted with so many seemingly disparate antics and ideas, they were as baffled as Ellen Terry, who summed up his personality in a series of contradictory adjectives: "Dear, kind, unjust, generous, cautious, impulsive, passionate, gentle Charles Reade!"

Even now, in the light of recent scholarship and biography, Reade is still a shadowy figure. But it is possible to discern the lineaments of a man behind the mask of "odd violences, impetuosities, and generosities" — a man struggling for personal and literary expression. And if he ultimately failed in his literary struggle, he fought, and to a certain extent won, his battle for personal salvation. Though lonely and frustrated, continually at war with himself, his family, in fact all his surroundings — not for a year or a period of years, but from boyhood, into early middle age — he finally managed to overcome his difficulties; at the age of forty-two achieving his own Baconian version of "The Everlasting Yea" with the publication of his first great fictional success, appropriately entitled It Is Never Too Late To Mend. From this time onwards he was a new man, still lonely and frustrated and truculent, despite the love and companionship of Mrs. Seymour, but able to write out , and upon occasion act out, his own heroic vision of himself, and thus make his daydreams and fantasies come true. Reade's famous "Notebooks" reveal the precariousness as well as the artistic consequences of his Victorian compromise with reality. But that is another story which I shall take up later on. The first need is for a reinterpretation of what Reade later referred to as his "wasted youth."

ii

Reade himself furnished the key to his own emotional development. In later life, speaking as a famous writer, he was fond of declaring (with more perceipience than he realized), "I owe the larger half of what I am to my mother, the rest to the accident of my father's grandfather having married the daughter of the village blacksmith." Compton L. Reade, in his obituary article on Reade[2], and later in Charles Reade A Memoir, denied the obvious implications of this statement, maintaining that, despite Reade's insistence upon "Brains first, virility next, and ancestry in the background..." he cherished "the knowledge that he was by descent a gentlemen.. adhered beneath the surface to such old-world beliefs as religion and birth. His pen was so far con amore on the side of virtue that his readers — erroneously — may have imagined him a saint; and his passionate appeal to the people in one of his grandest dramatic scenes, no less than his habit of constituting his countrymen the real arbiters of every issue, including, as in the Staunton Case, life and death, may have conveyed the impression that his political sentiments were democratic. As a matter of fact, he was alike a believer in Christianity, and a Tory in his reverence of proprietary rights, albeit he recked little of the claims of creed, and less those of royalty."

Of course there is some truth here. Reade was the youngest child of "John Reade, lord of the manors of Ipsden Huntercombe and Ipsden Bassett, and of half the manor of Checkenden in the county of Oxford, by Anna Maria, eldest daughter of Major John Scott-Waring, M. P. ..." Moreover, he was acutely aware of his ancestry, in his own autobiographical sketch "devoting about a tenth part of its entirety to his pedigree;" and his "almost romantic reverence for his ancestors extended beyond them, to their acreage and mansions... ." All this is undeniable: Reade did accept many of the ideas and attitudes which may be labelled "Tory," including a love for field sports, hunting in particular, which in later life he attempted to abjure as inconsistent with humanitarian principles. Yet he was never a Tory in the sense Compton Reade implies, not even as a boy. In playing a word game at Ipsden, presumably when he was about sixteen, he set forth his ideals in verse, and they are as Commercial and Benthamite as they are tritely Tory:

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2. Compton Reade, "Charles Reade," Contemperary Review, XLV (1884), 767

My desires are not grand,
Funds and railway shares and land,
Health, wit, money, quantum stuff.
A beauteous spouse, and that's enough.
Add good horses, a true friend,
A happy life, and a good end.
The rest I value a rope's end.[3]

While these verses cannot be considered too seriously, Reade's boyish references to funds and railway shares take on added point when viewed in relation to his own expectations. The youngest of elevn children, in a family more ancient than wealthy, he was further handicapped by his father's reluctance to give him any more financial help than was absolutely necessary. For instance, when it came to a decision as to whether or not he should go to Oxford, his father objected to the expense, saying he could go, but only provided he could obtain a scholarship. Undoubtedly in this, as in other instances, Reade's father was neither unkind nor ungenerous according to his own lights, which were those of a reasonably intelligent and well-meaning country squire. But Charles, though he showed no enthusiasm for Oxford, apparently felt the humiliation of his situation and treatment. In any case, he early developed a sense of alienation from his father and from the Tory life and values his father represented: "It was his boast through life that he was par excellence his mother's son, and a Scott-Waring rather than a Reade." This open repudiation of his father, implicit in his previously quoted acknowledgment of his mother and the village blacksmith, brings out the basic pattern of Reade's development: the rejection of the father and the Tory values of Ipsden in favor of the mother and a philosophy that would enable him to realize and justify his own conception of himself — a pattern that began in the nursery and continued through his entire life.

iii

Very little is known about Reade's childhood. He himself noted in his Diary: "I remember that when I was a little boy everybody noted my extraordinary helplessness. My dear sister Julia noticed it particularly at Sandgate, seeing how feebly I got off the coach, like one that expected to be lifted down. Once I fell off a coach into a man's arms, as I was getting up."[4] In thus linking the memory of his "extraordinary helplessness" with the name of Julia, Reade lends credence to what the Memoir asserts to be the facts of his early childhood. From the cradle Charles was, it seems, the special charge of Julia; then, as he began to grow up, she became his playmate and teacher as well as his nurse. In all these roles, aided and abetted by Mrs. Reade, Julia evidently responded to Charles's helplessness with extraordinary devotion — going so far, the Memoir declares, as to shelter "the fair-haired rosy cheeked urchin with the large, thoughtful eyes" from every consequence of his "temper" and "wilfullness." Until he was nine, therefore, the young Charles had as much protection and love as the most demanding child could wish for. Then Julia married, and, in the words of Malcolm Elwin, "a small boy was left derelict."

The word "derelict" is well chosen. It might be said, even without benefit of Freud, that the nine-year-old Reade never quite recovered, that he was to be searching all his life for another Julia, a woman who could give him the unquestioning love and security he felt as a child. His later references to Julia, his never mentioning her "except with some preface of endearment," the letter he wrote when she died — these and other supporting biographical facts, taken in conjunction with the characteristics of Julia Dodd and a whole line of fictional heroines,

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3. Quoted and identified by Rives, p. 35
4. Cf. Elwin, p. 20. The Diary seems to have been lost or destroyed. When I refer to it I am actually speaking of the excerpts included in the Memoir.

point towards the interpretation I have suggested. It is impossible and probably not at all necessary to say exactly where the influence of Julia leaves off and that of his mother begins. According to the Memoir "Charley" was always Mrs. Reade's prime favorite, and after Julia left, she apparently took over completely, causing Charles, already "a spoiled child if there ever was one," to seek in his relationship with her the answer to his developing conflicts with the outside world.

Of Mrs. Reade more later. It was at this most critical point in Reade's young life, just after Julia's marriage, that he was bundled off to a private school at Rose Hill run by a Mr. Slatter whom Reade later referred to as "Scourger." From the loving care of Julia and his mother to the prison-like discipline and beatings of Rose Hill was a transition like that which George Orwell later went through when his parents sent him to Crossgates. "Your home might be far from perfect," Orwell wrote, "but at least it was a place ruled by love rather than fear, where you did not have to be perpetually on your guard against the people surrounding you. At eight years old you were suddenly taken out of this warm nest and flung into a world of force and fraud and secrecy, like a gold fish into a tank of pike. Against no matter what degree of bullying you had no redress... ."[5] This was Reade's situation, made worse by the fact that Slatter was as much of a Squeers as the Memoir declared him to be -- which is to say, he was literally a sadist, i. e. a man who beat the children in much the same way and for much the same reasons that Warden Hawes, in Reade's Never Too Late To Mend, beat the prisoners.[6] Possibly, as Malcolm Elwin has suggested, Slatter was no worse than many other nineteenth century schoolmasters, but that does not alter the effect of his treatment, for Reade seems to have had the same reaction to physical violence as the young George Augustus Sala, who so feared the treatment he was likely to receive in an English school that he talked his mother into letting him study in Paris.[7] For a number of reasons, however, Reade could not expect or request such leniency from his father. After all, his older brothers had literally passed through Slatter's hands without flinching -- or at least without a word of protest to their parents -- and in any case Mr. Reade did not believe in coddling. As a consequence Reade had no choice but to endure the rigors of Rose Hill for a period of almost five years. Yet as he endured in body he recoiled in spirit: the effect of Slatter's treatment, in so far as it can be ascertained, was to inflame rather than to curb his pride and sensitivity, causing him to feel more than ever alienated from the gentlemanly code he was expected to live by, more dependent on the love and tenderness and guidance of his mother.

Even if Mrs. Reade had been an ordinary woman, playing Gertrude to Reade's Hamlet, the situation was such that her influence would have been as powerful as the oedipal ties that bound Reade to her. But Mrs. Reade was by no means ordinary. She was a mind and a force as well as a woman and a mother. While still a girl, the Memoir recounts, she entered into "the life of politics, society, the Court ... Haydn had taught her music ... Sheridan epigram and repartee ... . Her manner was perfect ... her conversational powers so extraordinary as to have fascinated so superior a master of rhetoric as Samuel Wilberforce." Making due allowance for Compton L. Reade's own rhetoric, the facts still seem to indicate that the girl whom Grattan called his "Pretty Puritan" was a remarkably attractive and accomplished young lady, conversant with the best books and the best people in the best

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5. George Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," Partisan Review (September--October 1952), pp. 505-545. Orwell's analysis of his own school-boy sufferings is in many ways a commentary on what Reade must have gone through at Rose Hill.
6. See It Is Never Too Late To Mend, I, 362; Memoir, p. 42; Rives, pp. 29-34
7. Ralph Straus, Sala (London, 1942), pp. 27-28

tradition of eighteenth century gentility. Why a woman so truly elegant, in Jane Austen's sense of the word elegant, should marry a somewhat boorish young Squire and bury herself at Ipsden is more than a little puzzling. Perhaps, as the Memoir suggests, it was a true love match. If so, love was much less than enough for Mrs. Reade, who was not long content to be a mere wife and mother. Soon after the marriage she began to transform Ipsden, first into a country seat of culture and refinement; later, after she herself had become imbued with new Evangelical faith, into a stronghold of militant Evangelicalism.

Reade grew up in this later Ipsden, in the midst of the rustic court his mother had established. "At Ipsden House," in the words of the Memoir, "divines hummed like bees about a hive; Samuel Wilberforce was lately become curate of the neighboring parish of Checkenden, the Fabers were frequently there, and from Oxford came a little host of ecclesiastical dons, Plumtre, Macbride, Ellerton, and anybody who advocated Low-Church Doctrines." Upon occasion Mrs. Reade seems to have extended a welcome to many who were not Evangelical, drawing a hard and fast line only against "puseyites." George Grote was a member of her circle, so perhaps the religious atmosphere took on a Benthamite tinge at times. Nevertheless the prevailing atmosphere of the household was suffocatingly pietistic, with Reade's mother restlessly exhorting her children to follow the true faith, which she was at pains to interpret for them in aphoristic phrases such as the following, taken at random from the manuscript Dear Mother[8]:

> My hearts desire is that my children may be heirs to the Kingdom of God.
>
> . . .
>
> I have my several trials. I am chastened by them... . I am more satisfied when I feel sorrow, than when my heart rejoices.
>
> . . .
>
> The Love of the world is poison to the Christian.
>
> . . .
>
> What is true religion? It consists in a real conformity to the Law and in a genuine compliance with the Gospel.
>
> . . .
>
> She [Mrs. Reade's six-year-old daughter, Anna Maria] was my daily companion at 12 o'clock, and her father was wrapt in her. But both of us rejoiced when we found she had put off mortality for immortality.

And for her favorite son she had special words, the words I have quoted at the beginning of this chapter plus others I shall mention later on, all aimed directly at Reade, and designed to "convert his soul and make him a child of grace."

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8. Léone Rives (p. 20) describes the manuscript Dear Mother as follows:

"Nous avons pu nous faire de Mrs. Reade une idée plus juste que celle suggerée par Compton Reade, grâce à un manuscrit presque totalement inédit, intitulé Dear Mother, et qui a été conservé par la famille. Il renferme des fragments de lettres de Mrs. Reade, retranscrits avec un soin religieux par l'un de ses fils, nombre de ses mots saisis au vol et pieusement recueillis. La coloration générale de sa pensée, la substance intime de son moi réel sont comme cristallisées entre les feuillets de ce receuil. On y trouve des Poèmes d'elle, ses Meditations sur la Grâce divine, la Foi, la Prédestination, la Prière, les Textes Bibliques; ses réflexions sur L'Inde, son mari, ses enfants, ses amis... . Ce manuscrit est aujourd'hui en la possession de Mr. E. B. Reade, Streatham, Londres, qui a bien voulu nous le communiquer."

Although Reade could not respond quite as his mother wished, neither could he reject Evangelicalism outright, as Edmund Gosse and so many other eminent Victorians rejected it. His mother's hold on his mind and imagination was simply too powerful. What he did, as a boy and later as a man, was rather interpret the doctrines to fit his own personal needs and aspirations -- no great feat of rationalization, for Evangelicalism had its worldly side, and Mrs. Reade, for all her later piety, was inordinately ambitious for her children, particularly for Charles. She wanted him to be a success: to achieve greatness, "intellectual greatness," to become a bishop or something comparable. Needless to say, she also stressed polite accomplishments and gentlemanly conduct, much as Dr. Arnold stressed these ideals at Rugby. But her emphasis was different. Success was second only to Godliness, and Godliness, if not a means to success, was certainly in no way incompatible with it.. Consequently she felt free to urge Charles on to the greatness that she, as a woman, and a woman married to Squire Reade, had never been permitted to achieve, that neither her husband nor her older sons had been permitted to achieve. Charles was her last hope, and in her anxiety to secure his triumph she consciously or unconsciously sought to mold his every feeling and thought, to make him into a male counterpart of herself, or more accurately her own image of herself.

There is, of course, nothing unique about Mrs. Reade's efforts. Overly fond mothers often try to mold their sons in this way -- with no very serious consequences, so long as the boy in question is finally able to break the oedipal ties and develop his own individuality. This is part of the normal process of growing up. And if the young Charles had been less petted by Julia, less beaten by Mr. Slatter, less "spoiled" as "the baby of the family," he too might have been able to cope with his mother's domination. As it was, however, he needed the mother image she imposed almost as much as she needed to impose it -- and he responded accordingly. So that, although he never surrendered unconditionally, he became his mother's son in a very special sense -- how special can be seen (in part) by glancing through the following lines:

> One does not wish to see sentiment oozing out at every pore; but there is a bright look and a beaming eye that sets all life within afloat, and <u>that</u> pleases. Profession of all sorts is an emetic - but ice chills... .
>
> Nothing annoys me so much as the loss of the English language in the literature of the day. There is Carlyle, with his abominable German phraseology - conceited divines, with their Frenchified sentences and compound words that make me throw the book down. What think you of Montgomery ending an octavo volume with 'How?' I like pithy and epigrammatic sentences, a little antithesis also, but only a little... .
>
> Living in London, what is it? Cliques fashionable, cliques political, cliques religious, and clubs the exceptions.

Actually these bits of aphoristic wisdom are specimens of Mrs. Reade's conversation -- yet in idea, attitude, even style they can hardly be distinguished from Reade's own writing. Noting this closeness, the authors of the <u>Memoir</u> remarked that "his mother's brain was in many ways the replica of his own" -- a statement that is entirely true if one recognizes that his mother's mind was the original, Reade's the replica.

These similarities suggest the ultimate consequences of the mother-son relationshp. Until Charles left Ipsden, however, the oedipal marks were not som immediately apparent: his letters, the account of his activities at school and at Ipsden given in the <u>Memoir</u>, the manuscript <u>Dear Mother</u> -- all these sources, when pieced together, reveal a self-centered, precociously pompous boy of seventeen:

not particularly brilliant or gifted, yet proud, ambitious, sensitive — so sensitive, if the Memoir is correct, that he preferred the company of women to that of boys or men. This was the young Reade of 1831, when he was preparing to go to Oxford. Up to this time his personal ideas and attitudes had been more or less acceptable to everyone around him. At home Julia and his mother had seen to that. And at school he had been partially protected by his older brother Compton. Except for the psychological shocks deriving from Slatter's treatment (and perhaps from his father's)[9] he had therefore escaped any flagrant violations of his own acute sensitivity. Magdalen College and the world outside were not to be so indulgent.

iv

That Charles should go to Oxford (preparatory to becoming a bishop!) was Mrs. Reade's idea, opposed by both Charles and Mr. Reade: by Charles because he did not wish to take even a first step toward the Church; by Mr. Reade because he considered the expense too great. After considerable debate Mrs. Reade prevailed, as usual, though (as I have already explained) Mr. Reade did manage to qualify his compliance, making it contingent upon Reade's ability to secure a scholarship. And so, at the very outset, Reade was doubly forced, doubly humiliated. For his mother's wishes, coupled with his father's stipulation, obliged him to secure a scholarship in order to enter upon a course of study he disliked in order to prepare for a career he detested.

If Reade felt as much resentment as I have suggested — and Mrs. Reade's comments in Dear Mother indicate that he did — he nevertheless entered upon his Magdalen career auspiciously enough, winning a "demyship" by writing a brilliant English essay on the subject "How far is Ambition productive of Virtue." In the red-plush phraseology of the Memoir: "To a man, the other candidates... proceeded... to decry ambition as one of the devastating forces of humanity. Charles Reade, however, being himself wildly ambitious, was not so canting a hypocrite as to abuse a quality he admired intensely. He took pen and wrote con brio, yet judgmatically, his ideas. In barbarous days, he affirmed, when war is the only outlet for ambition, ambition showed to the greatest disadvantage as being pure selfishness. But... to the domain of learning and the arts these censures were quite inapplicable. Without ambition as a motive power... there would be no excellence, nothing but a dead level of mediocrity. Further, he argued that the sole alternative of ambition would be a chaotic stagnation of all the mental faculties; and, in brief, his peroration was the warmest eulogium of the very quality which the other candidates had been gibbeting as the meanest of vices." Minus the rhetorical flourishes this would appear to be a fair summary of the essay. At least it sounds like Reade — as if he were repeating his mother's arguments, but with a peculiar vehemence all his own — a vehemence that should perhaps have given his Magdalen examiners some clue to his make-up. Certainly if they had understood the attitudes underlying his expressed ideas — attitudes anathema to Magdalen — they would have been less ready to laud his honesty and talent, less willing to elect him Demy. But from Mills, a tutor, to Dr. Routh, the president of the College, they declared the essay a student masterpiece. "And thus, as it were, by acclamation," the Memoir concludes, "Charles Reade was elected Demy of Magdalen."

The prosaic fact is that Charles Reade matriculated on "26th July 1831." Soon afterwards Mrs. Reade accompanied Charles to Oxford, and once again, this

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9. The authors of the Memoir drew such a thick veil around the tension between Reade and his father that it is impossible to speak with certainty about their early relationships. Possibly the latent hostility was exacerbated and brought to the surface by Reade's long stay at home following his return from the schools of Mr. Slatter (1923-27) and Mr. Hearn (1927029). The D. N. B. states that Reade was at home with his father from 1829 to 1831, during which time he "prepared unaided a systematic course of study."

time at the age of seventeen, a boy was left derelict. Mrs. Reade, after returning to Ipsden, recorded her own feelings at parting: "I left my Charles in his splitude of College with an aching heart. Recollections pressed on me. How differently situated were my elder sons, cast into the wide world at seventeen or eighteen; and perhaps Oxford only seventeen miles off, as dangerous as India!" Mrs. Reade's fears were justified: Oxford was as dangerous as India, though not quite in the way she envisaged. Reade was never to take Tractarianism seriously — "Newman amused him, but only as a polished buffoon" — nor was he attracted to the society of "the purely betting and equine men." The dangers he encountered were of a different order altogether, the result of his personal conflict with Magdalen, at that time a notoriously backward college in "a University that still clung to the past with obstinate tenacity, and prided itself on keeping behind the material and intellectual movement of the age."[10] To Reade, fresh from the atmosphere of his mother's Ipsden, Magdalen was by contrast a sink of intellectual and moral decadence, peopled by monkish scholars and clicquish students whom he could not respect, or pretend to respect. It was not long, therefore, until his reactions became evident to his fellow students, inciting them to respond in kind. "His aversion to alcohol alone," Malcolm Elwin has observed, "was enough to offend those who were fond of the College port." And that was only the beginning: Reade's ways and values fitted so poorly with those of Magdalen that he was soon at odds with nearly everyone in the College, more particularly and most disastrously with the Demies of his own common room.

For the first time, it would seem, Reade experienced the overwhelming pressures of group antagonism. Magdalen was not Ipsden; the men of the common room would not honor his feelings of difference and superiority. Yet he could not comply, or even compromise with their demands for conformity: he was too sensitive, too proud, or, if one wishes, too "spoiled." He had no choice but to fight back. This is why their criticism, designed to put him in his place, make a man of him, etc., had just the opposite effect. The more he was pressured, the more perversely he reacted, until, as Lóne Rives points out, he began to cut a revolutionary figure, wearing long curls, a bright green coat with brass buttons, and in general conducting himself so strangely — what with his fiddle playing and dancing the double shuffle — that he came to be referred to as "Mad Charles." Of course he was not really mad, any more than William Morris was mad when the students at Marlborough declared him so. The loud clothes and eccentric behavior were an expression of defiance, his protest against what he felt to be the deadliness of Magdalen mediocrity.[11]

Much as Reade despised Magdalen, however, he could not break away. Perhaps he lacked the courage to defy his mother's wishes — wholly, that is; perhaps too he was coming to realize that the material independence he so wanted could best be secured through academic channels. At any rate, though he continued his protest, and in 1835 began "to make notes with a view to writing fiction," he still did enough prescribed work to maintain his standing in the College,

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10. J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris (World's Classics), p. 29. Mackail's wonderfully revealing description of Oxford in the early fifties (especially pp. 29-33) is directly applicable to Reade's Magdalen. Cf. Elwin, pp. 28-29; Goldwin Smith, Reminiscences (New York, 1910), pp. 50-74.

11. Elwin disagrees with the present interpretation of Reade's career at Oxford. He says, "... Nobody who knew him [Reade] well disliked him...;" that instead, Reade "was regarded with a mixture of curiosity and amusement."

Elwin didn't have all the facts. Reade was disliked by certain people. (See Rives, p. 179.) But even if one agrees that Reade was not disliked, that in reality he was usually dismissed as crazy, at at least eccentric — would that make his relationship to his college more pleasant? Cf. Elwin, pp. 58-60.

knowing full well that once he had taken his B. A. his Demyship qualified him for a Fellowship. Then rather unexpectedly, in June, 1835, a Fellowship open to candidates born in Oxfordshire became vacant. The only difficulty was that Reade did not yet have his B. A., had not even planned to take his examinations that June. Nevertheless, with only three weeks' preparation, he took his degree — a third in Greats — and a month later, on July 22, he was elected a probationary fellow.

At the age of twenty-one Reade thus secured a modest income for life, subject only to the requirements of the Fellowship, minimal save for the enforced celibacy. Moreover, in this same year, by virtue of some adept maneuvering, he won a Vinerian Scholarship in addition to his Fellowship. The Vinerian, it seems, was awarded by a vote of the Masters of Arts — a procedure which, in the ordinary course of events (i.e., with only the resident Masters voting), would have nullified Reade's chances altogether. But in this instance he was too many for his detractors. Taking advantage of the technicalities that governed the voting, he enlisted the aid of his parents to wage a campaign such as Oxford had never before witnessed. On the day of the election (December 1, 1835)[12], non-resident Masters from miles around — friends and acquaintances recruited by the Reades — descended upon the University in such numbers as to elect Reade by a crushing majority.

Yet his feelings were still not assuaged. To add to the discomfiture of his Magdalen enemies he decided to attend the "solemn High Table Dinner" where, as he well knew, the men would be obliged to offer their congratulations. "The etiquette of the High Table" was scrupulously observed, the Memoir relates, until one man, less guarded than the rest, openly challenged Reade by saying he had displaced two better men than himself. To which Reade answered: "No, better scholars, not better men... . The Vinerian is a law scholarship, and law is a practical sort of science. Now the way in which my canvas was organized and carried out was rather unusual, but it argues a talent of the practical kind superior to that of my competitors. The University in its wisdom has chosen right." If this account is reasonably accurate — and it seems to be — it shows that Reade's youthful powers of self-justification were quite remrkable. And to strengthen them still further there was always his mother, who on this occasion, in an effort to bolster Reade's confidence and urge him on to greater things, went so far as to express herself in verse:

Vinerian Victor! lash thy steed
And gallant ride the classic field,
Silence the clamorous bevy:
Let talents and thy worth declare
You'll earn the laurels that you wear
Though friendship gain'd the victory.

Let pride and sloth, two foes of thine
No more their selfish web entwine
Around Vinerian Victor.
Up, up, and with the golden shield
Of principle, your weapons wield
And slay your foes like Hector.

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12. Reade apparently won the Vinerian in 1835 (rather than, as previously maintained, in 1842) though the Scholarship was not formally conferred upon him until February 17, 1842. In dating this and related events of Reade's college career I have followed Rives, whose account is in part based on a manuscript "inédit et inachevé communiqué par Mr. E. B. Reade, Streatham, Londres: biographie de Charles Reade que Mr. Arthur Reade, Superintendent de l'Hôpital de Charing Cross-à-Londres, avait entrepris d'écrire, et qui, à peine commencé, fut interrompue par la mort."

Then rouse thee, Victor, rouse thee
Shake off that ominous dozy:
Bind that bright armour on.
Let "Rome's Magnificence" charm thee
Her piilars, columns, history,
And gain the classic crown!

The martial spirit of these verses Reade undoubtedly found congenial: by this time he too recognized the need for victory, and to achieve that end was quite prepared to slay his foes like an Evangelical Hector. But his goal was not the classic crown, could not be achieved through the Church. On this one point neither the exhortations nor the commands of his mother could change his mind, not even when they were put into the form of prayer, as in the lines from Dear Mother beginning "Assist us, merciful God...". Reade's struggle, obliquely reflected in Mrs. Reade's comments, must have cost him agony, yet he maintained his dogged resistance without wavering — as though he somehow realized that surrender meant psychic death — until Mrs. Reade finally gave way.

V

Though more his own master after 1835, Reade's struggle for personal independence was far from ended. His victory over his mother was both limited and pyrrhic, serving only to loosen, not to break, the ties that bound him. Moreover, his victories over Magdalen were in themselves restrictive. After rejecting a religious career, for which nearly all the Fellowships at Magdalen were reserved, his only possibility was to secure a lay Fellowship in either medicine or law. With Mrs. Reade's grudging consent (expressed in her comment "Law is a cold study for the inner soul of a Christian") he first chose law — to discover that there was only one Law Fellowship available. For a time, when he thought he had lost this Fellowship to a rival candidate (Richard Sewell, a Newdigate prizeman who later became a noted barrister) he gave up law and went to Edinburgh to study medicine — only to faint at his first sight of blood. At this point it looked as if he had no choice but to take Orders or renounce his Fellowship. With typical resourcefulness, however, he discovered a way out by appealing the Magdalen decision which had gone in favor of Sewell. In his own words: "The matter turned on the interpretation of a statute... . I appealed to the Visitor. The Visitor directed the case to be heard before him. Neither side employed counsel. I was victorious, and won my first litigation out of eighteen, and retain my Fellowship to this day." A typical Readian statement, yet the Visitor, it must be noted, "was the Bishop of Winchester, Dr. Sumner, his mother's friend... ." It was therefore with his mother's help — the whole idea of an appeal may have originated with her — that he once again conquered Magdalen, this time creating so much indignation that the College revoked its own statutes and permitted Dr. Sewell to retain his Fellowship as a layman.

The year following this episode must have been a purgatorial one for Reade, since, as a probationary fellow, he had to remain in residence for some time — perhaps for a whole year, even though, if Elwin is correct, he was formally entered at Lincoln's Inn on November 20, 1835. In any event when he was able to leave Magdalen for Lincoln's Inn, presumably in November, 1836, he immediately found in London a freer, more congenial life. During his first year he "read in chambers with Samuel Warren," a novelist who had already achieved some reputation and was soon to become noted as the author of Ten Thousand A Year. And while it may be true, as the Memoir states, that "the two of a trade failed to agree," Reade's acquaintance with Warren almost certainly encouraged him in his own literary ambitions, if only in giving him a sense of what it meant to be a popular author. Then too there was the London theatre, opening up to Reade, familiar only with the touring companies that visited Oxford in the summer, a new and wonderful world of make-believe — a world so artfully presented that for a few hours out of the twenty-four he could escape Magdalen, his mother, everything, and live his own

heroic vision of himself. Finally there was London itself, with all the romance of its actuality — its people, activities, commerce. To all this he responded, finding himself at one with the restless modernity of London life. "Here," he wrote, "a man so clearly sees, by looking out of a window for 10 seconds, that if he dawdles he will be distanced, that he cannot help shaking himself."

But resolutions are one thing, actions another; held prisoner by his inner confusions he could not muster the psychic energy necessary to throw off his Magdalen lethargy. Furthermore, he was considerably handicapped by the restrictions attached to his Fellowship. Until he took his M. A., in April, 1838, and was granted formal permission to live in London, he was obliged to spend a part of every year at Magdalen, now so hateful to him that in order to make his rooms more bearable, he painted the walls green, the ceiling an intense blue — to imitate, he said, tropical vegetation and the sky of the Antilles. And when he was in London, there was his work at Lincoln's Inn, for which he had less and less enthusiasm. Although he spoke favorably of his law studies in a letter of November 12, 1836 (quoted by the Memoir), his guarded words suggest that he was probably trying to reassure his mother, whose ambitions for him were as grandiose as ever. Thwarted in her desire to see him a Bishop, she now looked to his becoming Chief Justice. Knowing this, Reade could hardly write everything he thought. Certainly he could not tell her of his literary interests, for like so many strict Evangelicals she had come to look upon the theatre as little short of iniquitous, other forms of literary activity as at best frivolous. "Immortal beings," she declared, undoubtedly for Reade's special benefit, "should not flutter among the trifles of literature. What a field for thought and action are the realities of life, and the certainty of a future state."

Though Reade failed to respond to these admonitions in the way Mrs. Reade would have liked, she nevertheless continued to hope for the best., in the meantime giving him spiritual and financial support. In 1839, the Memoir points out, she "provided him with adequate funds for a tour of the continent" — a tour that is recorded in Reade's letters (printed at length in the Memoir) to his mother, his father, and William, the one brother he admitted to something approaching friendship. The letters to his mother and father, evidently written for the whole family, are uniformly trite and properly deferential, relieved only by a few individual touches, notably his account of Mdlle. Mars' acting, which I shall discuss in another connection, and a revealing little postscript that requires no comment: "P. S. — In answer to something in your letter, I have not spent one farthing of your money on knick-knackeries, and I will not spend above one napoleon so during all my tour. 'Foi de Chevalier!"

More interesting because less inhibited is his letter to William, in which he writes: "Of course I have been all along on the lookout for little traits of character, national and individual... ." This statement suggests he was carrying out his plan, presumably undertaken in 1835, of taking notes with a view to writing fiction. In any event his selection of traits and incidents reveals the preoccupation that was to dominate his "Notebooks" and nearly all of his writing: "There are in Paris four thundering slaughterhouses... . One of these I visited, and having to cross a moderate-sized river of blood and filth, I showed signs of aversion, whereon my French conductor grinned from ear to ear and said: 'Monsieur, ce n'est pas propre!'" Again, apropos of his difficulties with spoken French, he wrote: "I once soared in conversation as high as what Aristotle calls a gnome, i. e. a sort of moral maxim sententiously expressed: e. g. a cab-driver was working his machine over the stones to take me to a neighboring village, and kept whipping his beast. Says I, 'Ne fatiguez pas votre cheval. Les chevaux sont les bons serviteurs de l'homme.' 'Bon,' says the Frenchman with a look of intense admiration, his eyes glistening, and (as they invariably do when anything bright strikes their minds from within or without) took his horse a flank that sounded like the crack of a pistol." Then a few sentences further along: "I went to the

Morgue twice. There was a corpse there each time, the first had no marks, the second a number of little cuts round the left breast... ." And to this observation he appends an account of murders, etc., particularly as practiced on the bridges of Paris. It is almost as if Reade spent his time shuttling between the slaughterhouses and the morgue, with side trips to the bridges, where he was constantly on the lookout for horsewhippings and throatcuttings. Actually, as the full context of the letter shows, he also noted a few non-violent French traits, e. g. the shortcomings of lower-class dancing, which he quite inexplicably attributed to the fact that "The French ladies are so very ill-made... ." But these observations are overshadowed by his extraordinary interest in blood and violence[13].

Beginning with the extreme sensitivity he showed at Mr. Slatter's there seems to be a straight psychological line extending through his experiences at medical school, where he fainted at the sight of blood, to the reactions apparent in these letters from Paris — a line that became broader and deeper in the years that followed, to emerge in his later life and writings as an obsessional form of humanitarianism that conforms to a pattern which has since come to be recognized as sado-masochistic. Not that Reade's feelings — or those of anyone else for that matter — can be fully explained by reference to a psychanalytic pattern. Every man is unique, even in his typicality; and if one is to understand Reade's sadistic tendencies, it is necessary to see them in relation to his whole personality as well as in relation to the similar tendencies of Victorian writers and reformers from Tennyson to Lord Shaftesbury, many of whom, to all outward appearances, were as violently humanitarian as Reade. Where Reade's humanitarianism differed (as further analysis will reveal) was in the quality of its bloodthirstiness; and this difference, most sensationally evident in the Notebooks, seems to derive from the sadistic tendencies already evident in these early reactions to blood and violence.

vi

During the years immediately following his European tour Reade was freer than ever before — and, it would seem, lonelier. In his restlessness, he was forever moving between London, Ipsden, and Scotland, with occasional trips to Paris, and now and then, when necessity demanded, a brief stopover at Magdalen. "To avoid the trouble of packing up, carrying luggage, and forming plans," the Memoir relates, he kept "a complete outfit at all points of the compass." Thus when he felt too much alone in London (he had no close friends; only the squirrels, the predecessors of the antelope and numberless other pets, that ran loose in his Leicester Square lodgings) he could turn to his Mother and Ipsden. Or rather he could until his dealings in old violins precipitated an open break with his father. After that he took another trip to Paris, and for a considerable time omitted Ipsden from his nomadic itinerary, possibly supplanting it with more frequent trips to Scotland where, some time between 1835 and 1839, he had met and fallen in love with a young fishwife, the prototype of Christie Johnstone.

According to Léone Rives whose account of this episode substantiates what Elwin and others have surmised, there was probably a Scotch marriage, i. e. a kind of declaration of marriage before witnesses. At least Reade lived with this girl (whenever his circumstances and Mrs. Reade permitted) from 1838 or 1839 up to the time of her death in 1848, following the birth of a son who was christened Charles

13. Reade also reveals his preoccupation with French violence, particularly whipping, in his letter to his mother (Memoir, pp. 123-24). In one passage he described a driver who indulged "in pantomimic gestures that ended in a flank all around him for his beasts." He noted in another that the French coachmen "drove horses just as Englishmen drive pigs, let the reins fall upon their backs, and laid the whip into them in forty different ways. The whip is everything with these fellows. It is never idle, always either cracking in the air or stinging the cattle."

Liston and generally thought to be Reade's godson, until Reade, shortly before his death, recognized him as Charles Liston Reade. Beyond these few facts little is known about the relationship between Reade and his Christie, though, if one accepts Malcolm Reade's autobiographical interpretation of Christie Johnstone, Mrs. Reade played a role similar to that of Mrs. Gatty in the novel, forcing Reade to treat Christie as a mistress, his son as a godson — as a means of preserving his Fellowship and as the price of retaining her own love and respect. That it happened this way is almost certain: Reade could hardly have kept his affair with Christie a secret from the family; indeed he probably met her on one of his many visits to his brother William, who lived at Crieff, in Perthshire. And if Mrs. Reade knew, she acted — doubtless with the same dispatch she was to show a number of years later (1851) when her boy was thirty-seven years old, Vice-president of Magdalen, and threatened by the charms of a famous actress, Mrs. Stirling, who had come to spend a week with him at Oxford. In Reade's own words (as recounted by John Coleman in his Charles Reade as I Knew Him):

> Some good-natured friend wrote to Ipsden that the Vice-Chancellor of Magdalen had been seen trotting about with a play-actress, and next day, just as my fair friend and I were sitting down to lunch in my rooms, the Chatelaine of Ipsden descended upon us. She did not wait for any introduction. It was the first and only time I ever knew the Mater to forget herself.
>
> I must do the other lady the justice to say she did not — indeed, she never acted so well on the stage as she did on that occasion.
>
> "You are his mother, madam, and he is my friend," she said. "Don't trouble, sir; you are needed here, and I am not. I can find my way."
>
> I drove home with mother that night, and next day (Sunday) we went to church together. When she said "forgive us our trespasses," she clasped my hand. I returned the clasp, and from that time forth the incident was closed.

Although Coleman is not always a trustworthy biographer, he did know Reade personally, and some of his information, rejected as unreliable by Malcolm Elwin, has been verified by more recent scholarship. In the present instance, if one discounts the awful sprightliness, Coleman's dramatization seems to be authentic — even to the final handclasp, which is psychologically in keeping with what is known of Reade, his mother, and the situation. Reade's own letters to and about Mrs. Stirling — one of which Percy Allen described as "too intimate and passionate for quotation" — show that Reade was in love with Mrs. Stirling, or thought he was; that despite a break in their relationship, probably accentuated if not caused by Mrs. Reade, he was thinking of Mrs. Stirling as well as Christie when he wrote the last chapter of Christie Johnstone. In a letter of 1852 to Mrs. Baylis, mostly devoted to Mrs. Stirling, he wrote: "C. J. concludes with a panegyric of Marriage (as I understand it). I describe it as Moses might the promised land, all the brighter because I have no hope of ever tasting it."[14]

By 1853, then, Reade was a confirmed though reluctant bachelor, ostensibly because of the technical celibacy required by his Fellowship, but also, it seems clear, because of his mother's feelings, and his own. In addition to Mrs. Reade's direct influence, there was Reade's own image of her, sufficient in itself to create a psychic block against any possible marriage, since the most perfect woman could hardly measure up to the more than human perfection of his Julia-mother ideal. For this reason he could love and wish to marry only those women who were

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14. Percy Allen, The Stage Life of Mrs. Stirling (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co.) p. 153. Some of the letters Allen quoted (pp. 128-155) are extremely interesting, particularly the undated letter (p. 136) from Reade to Mrs. Baylis in which Reade looks back on his lost love with complete detachment. The letter concludes: "Say! did I not love this woman? I am quite contented, dear Mrs. Baylis, and hope to be an artist of the pen before I die... ."

unattainable — except as ideal wives, e. g. the married Mrs. Stirling, the dead as opposed to the living Christie. In the flesh these women were too much like "the charming, clever woman, beautiful as the dawn" whom he met at Durham (July 15, 1852) — only to discover, a few days later, that she was "madly in love with a man hideous as midnight, and not one idea in his skull." Such women, Reade comments, are like Miss Chaworth, who "utterly despised Lord Byron, and venerated a brainless boor, a snob, a beast, who leathered her with his riding whip... . She respected the Beast and despised the Man." Of all the weaknesses common to women, it was this attraction to the Beast and/or Blackguard — a trait he recorded in the Notebooks under the heading "Calibani"[15] — that Reade found most disturbing. And so, within five days after meeting this real woman, beautiful as the dawn, he rejected her and once again turned to his ideal, this time as embodied in Peg Woffington, an eighteenth century actress whose portrait he had studied, and fallen in love with, during his evenings in the Garrick Club. On July 20, 1852, he confided to his Diary: "I am in love with Peg Woffington. She is dead, and can't sting. I love her... ."

vii

Ideals like Peg could not sting, but neither could they return Reade's love. Eventually he managed to find a livable compromise between the real and ideal in his relationship with Mrs. Seymour. But that was much later. During the years from 1838 to 1852 he had only his mother and Christie, neither of whom could give him the love and encouragement he so much needed. Whatever her virtues, Christie's position was such that she could only function as his mistress, and that for only a few weeks at a time. And Mrs. Reade, who was after all a mother not a wife, could only respond to Reade's psychic demands by denying — and causing him to deny — his manhood — which, all unknowingly, is exactly what she did. Unwilling or unable to let him grow up and therefore away from her, she continued to regard him as her own wayward boy, to be coaxed and cajoled into accepting her will and her ideals as his own. To overcome his resistance — always, as she saw it, for his own good — she exerted all her motherly wiles, and with such effect that Reade either submitted or vacillated uneasily between rebellion and compliance. In 1845, for example, when the office of Dean of Arts at Magdalen fell to Reade's option, she insisted that he accept, for her sake as well as his own. At first Reade flatly refused, much as he needed the extra money which went with the office, on the ground that he could never live through another year in residence — only submitting, and then reluctantly, when his brother William agreed to share his rooms. So the struggle went on and on, with Reade torn between the demands of his mother's love and those of his own confused feelings and ambitions.

In this state of turmoil, and without any close friends to share his problems, Reade followed one vocation after another, in one place after another. Though called to the Bar in 1842, he never practised, probably because he could not settle down to the confining routine of legal work. He much preferred the life of a herring fisherman, or that of a dealer in violins and pictures, for these businesses, if they can be so designated, offered him excitement as well as a chance for quick gains. The bargaining, speculative side of commerce strongly appealed to Reade, as did the power that came with commercial success; indeed, if he had possessed more capital and been more fortunate in his business ventures, he might well have channeled his ambitions towards commercial rather than literary success. As it happened, however, he failed in every single venture, not disastrously but to the extent that he was repeatedly forced to apply for subsidies from his mother, who "permitted him to anticipate the sum he would... receive under her marriage settlement after death."

15. Included with the Notebooks is a printed pamphlet entitled "List of Subjects Entered as headings in my various guard books and solid digests." Under "C" Reade lists "Calibani et Calinbanae, or human brutes..." Emerson Grant Sutcliffe, in his invaluable "Charles Reade's Notebooks" (Studies in Philology, January, 1930) reprints the entire "List of Subjects."

No matter what Reade attempted during these years it ended in frustration and continued dependence. As he failed in one undertaking after another, as he saw himself, after Christie's death, alone and defeated in the eyes of everyone but himself and his mother, his pride was at the breaking point. Unless he was to sink hopelessly into the life of an academic nonentity he simply had to write. That was, he knew, his sole remaining hope. Yet he had been trying since 1835, and the words simply would not come. All he could do was read and take notes and go to school to the theatre—mostly, it seems, he went to the theatre, where he could laugh and cry with the hero at the same time he was initiating himself into the secrets of dramatic art—or so he believed. In any event, whether his wanderings led him to Paris, or London, or Edinburgh, Coleman reports, he was so often in the front row of the pit, at the Theatre Royal and the Adelphi, that the company, noting his sailor-like walk and eccentric dress, christened him "The Mad Sailor." In Reade's own words, as recorded by Coleman, "I knew no one—not a living soul in Auld Reekie—save the actors and actresses, to whom I never spoke then, but whom I seem, after the lapse of all these years, to recall as the dear friends and companions of my lonely youth."

The phrasing may be Coleman's but the loneliness was Reade's, and it was all he could do to bear up under it. For the hours of gaslight and make-believe were inevitably followed by a return to his own situation—and his own attempts to write. How deeply he felt his literary impotence, combined as it was with all the other frustrations I have mentioned, is evident in the bitterness of his later references to "wasted youth," all to the effect that he never lived until he began to write. In 1857, following his first great success with <u>It Is Never Too Late to Mend</u>, he noted:"A man of genius should take great care of his body. On his carcass depends his fate. The genius that breaks down at 35 dies despised. At 40 he dies just as he is beginning to weather mortification, insult and wrong, and jackasses may bray over his bones. If he can contrive to keep his body afoot till 80, he shall be honoured." This reference to "the genius that breaks down at 35" is especially significant. Reade himself was close to breaking down at that age (in 1849) when he was called home to attend his father who had become senile and was though to be near death. The call, it seems, came from his mother, who wished to have Reade with her at the time, possibly to reconcile him to his father. If this was her plan, it worked out beautifully, for upon seeing his father in so pitiable a state Reade quickly lost all his old bitterness and became a dutiful son. To combat his father's recurrent fits of "morbid depression," Reade taught him to play whist, a game to which he responded with such enthusiasm that it "was played from morning till night, with intervals for meals." While Reade was devoting himself to his father, Elwin explains, "he was enabled to spend the few hours of freedom which he contrived to snatch from the bondage of the whsit table to tranquil reflection, no longer agitated by the itch to be out and about in search of the elusive inspiration to write, because his inactivity was a necessity. And, ironically, his resignation to delay brought him nearer to his goal than all his years of restlessness... it was probably in 1849, while his father was declining gradually in senile decay, that he began the first draft of <u>Christie Johnstone</u>.

That Reade thus began writing (and therefore, as he says elsewhere, "living") just when his father began dying follows from what is known of the conflict between father and son. Given only the few facts contained in the <u>Memoir</u> one does not have to be a Freudian to see how Reade was able to throw off some of his deepest fears and inhibitions through his father's death (Oct. 24, 1849). Of course it was a complicated process: even after expiating his feelings of guilt over the scarifidial whist table, Reade was doubtless afflicted with all the feelings of contrition Malcolm Elwin suggests. But along with these feelings, perhaps in spite of them, there was also a sense of release—a release from what he rightly or wrongly felt to be the unloving tale of parental

tyranny he had so long struggled against. Freed from this hostile father figure, he remained on with his mother at Ipsden, writing at least a part of the time, until the fall of 1850, when he at last felt equal to challenging the theatrical world with the first dramatic version of Christie Johnstone.

viii

Reade's first efforts to place Christie Johnstone were heartening enough. Mrs. Stirling liked the play and submitted it to Tom Taylor. Before Taylor had time to consider it, however, Reade had once again permitted his mother to talk him into accepting still another college office. He was therefore vice-president of Magdalen, and bound to fulfill the demands of that office for almost a full year, when Mrs. Stirling returned the manuscript, along with a note from Taylor saying that "the play was full of strength" but "unfitted for the stage," and suggesting "he should make a novel of it." With his heart set on dramatic success, Reade was cruelly disappointed — so much so that, as Malcolm Elwin has explained, he became "distracted at the prospect of existing impotently for a whole year at Oxford... [and] penned the following hysterical epistle to Dr. Routh:"

> Rev. and dear Sir, I have to throw myself on your compassion in making what I feel is an unusual request. I have all my life been subject to occasional depression of spirits. I cannot account for it; it comes like a cloud, and like a cloud it goes. But my solitary rooms are very unfavourable to me under such circumstances, and the best thing for me is a Family where I see cheerful faces and hear good people who speak to me of God. Will you look kindly on a constitutional misfortune, and permit me to leave College for ten days or a fortnight... . your dutiful servant, C. Reade, V. P.

This letter, quoted in full by Elwin, shows how precarious was Reade's psychological balance. The closer he approached his literary goals the more restive, even frantic, he became. Victimized by his own anxieties he began to see the theatrical world as a macrocosm of Magdalen — himself as a lone and persecuted genius. At one point, his Diary reveals, he broke down so completely that he had to spend several months in a sanitarium:

> Ipsden House, Wallingford, May 7, 1852
> I am so ill in mind and body that I have resolved to go to Malvern.
>
> Bellevue Hotel, Malvern. - What is more horrible than being alone in a strange place at an inn, and it raining?
> Then the doctors are like Eastern princes. Dr. Gully, I am told, receives no visits after noon. So I am to take mine ease at mine inn till tomorrow... .
>
> June 7, Malvern - I have now been a month in this place, and were I to call it a month stolen from my life, it would not be far from the truth.
> It has been a month of ennui and utter collapse of bodily and mental power. Mine is a nature that requires some little amusement and also the sound of some little human sentiment. Deprived of these for so many dreary days, solitary and cheerless, my mind is collapsing, and will go unless I save myself by flight... . I shall certainly run off one of these days. To Paris? Anywhere, and wash the taste of this Dead Sea out of my soul.
> Such is the result of a month filched from my short life in this wretched place.
>
> June 17. - Forty days, constant wind, so that I have not been able to sit one half-hour in the air. No acquaintance with a grain of feeling or brains, and I cannot stand dolts or fleshy statues.

Took what they call a lamp-bath the other day. I was to perspire. No such thing. Fainted instead. More refined, but less agreeable.

After leaving Malvern, Reade apparently went to Durham, to what may have been another sanitarium, where he was equally unhappy. And so the carousel started turning again: from Magdalen to Ipsden to Malvern to Durham to London to Paris... from the Ipsden drawing room to "hydros" to theatres and back again. Yet wherever Reade went, whatever he did, it was always the same — because he was always the same. His search for "cheerful faces... good people... human sentiment..." was in reality a search for his lost childhood, at home with his mother and his sister Julia. The boy was not just father to the man; emotionally he was the man. The death of his father, though it had given him the added freedom he needed to break through his writing block, led to a renewed understanding with his mother that bound him even more closely to her. And the rebuffs he received when he began to write served to reopen and deepen the psychic wounds he had suffered in his earlier conflicts with reality. On the threshold of authorship, at the age of thirty-eight, Reade was therefore as lonely and lost, as sensitive and egotistical and truculent, as when he alternately quailed and rebelled under the treatment he received from Mr. Slatter, his father, and Magdalen.

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